

Cambridgeshire Tractors Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Most of these stories originally appeared in the Cambridge Daily/Evening/News or the
Cambridgeshire Weekly News, its sister title.

They are supplemented by some articles published in the
Cambridge Independent Press or Cambridge Chronicle

Most were featured in my 'Looking Back' column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbook' of which this is a small section is published online at
bit.ly/CambsCollection

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.
I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in
touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library
where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the
1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2017

1904 03 29

It is certain that the farm motor has got a footing and much more will be heard of it before long. If prices could only be reduced somewhat a number of farmers, disgusted with the short time made by horse teams and appreciative of the advantage of being able with a fast and powerful tractor to choose favourable weather for tackling their arable, would be disposed to give motor ploughing a fair trial. Motor farming is likely to result in a more thorough cultivator of the land and not be an extension of those deplorable land-scratching and acres-grasping methods of which many pitiful examples may be seen on clay soils. Simplification of the mechanism is to be expected and it remains to be seen whether the proposed substitution of steam for petrol is wholly advantageous.

1912 05 31

The County Council sued Messrs Pepper and Hollis, gravel pit proprietors of Cambridge and Lt Abington for damage caused to the public highway by their heavy traction engines and trucks loaded with gravel. They had hauled 1,000 tons of gravel on the road from Abington to Pampisford, cutting it up. But Linton Council's steam tractor also used it, as did Pamplin's engines, commercial motors from Chaplin of Fulbourn, Christmas of Haverhill and Hudson's from Pampisford. 12 05 31

1918 05 15

Overtime tractors – advertisement – 18 05 15c

1918 05 29

Women's Land Army demonstration – 200 parade with motor tractor and traction engine; demonstration of hay bailing on Parker's Piece; need for more labour – 18 05 29b, c

1919 04 02

Cambridge industries: what firms have done during the war; how to encourage factories; address by H.S. Whipple. Includes: Chivers for jam and food stuffs, W. Saint made heavy crates and repaired ammunition boxes; Coulson & Lofts – locker cabinets for munitions; C. Kerridge – crates for jam and doors for huts; H.J. Gray – signal flag poles; P.H. Allin - Stokes shells and Mills grenades; Engineering Labs – high-explosive shells and gauges for manufacture other war equipment; Gas Light Company – benzol for high explosive and ammoniacal liquor for agriculture, tar for distilling for navy; CUP printed 1.6M copies of New Testament for troops; Suttle made chevrons and badges, part of 15,000 officers' uniforms; Mackintosh made gas chambers for treatment of those gassed in France, includes order from American army; King & Harper controlled all the mechanical tractors and implements within 15 miles which ploughed 16,000 acres in 1918; first two had been intended for hauling Russian guns but ploughed eight furrows at time; W.G. Pye made height finders for aeroplanes, special telescopes, sights for guns, electrical instruments etc; Cambridge Scientific Instrument Co made pyrometers for controlling temperature in manufacturing of war materials such as cartridge brass, manufacture of cordite etc; optical pyrometers formerly only made in Germany; special workshop for thermometers for aircraft ensuring water did not freeze in high-flying planes as well as instruments to determine height and special experimental work. Also considers future industries, need for housing etc – 19 04 02a

1919 12 17

Possibilities of tractor in agriculture discussed at Lion Hotel – 19 12 17b

1922 02 01

King & Harper demonstration of Fordson tractor pulling farm wagon – photo – 22 02 01b

1925 08 11

A serious fire occurred at Sandon's Farm, Ashdon. It was first noticed in a motor house which contained one lorry and a farm tractor. The Fire Brigade were handicapped by an inadequate supply of water but were able to save several buildings. Had the brigade been called by telephone from Ashdon

they could have arrived earlier, but instead a messenger came by road and in consequence much valuable time was lost. This is the largest fire in the district for some years.

1926 09 15

Considerable interest was taken in agricultural circles in a demonstration of stubble cleaning on the University Farm, Huntingdon Road, Cambridge. It had the dual object of acquainting farmers with the instruments available for such work and of bringing instrument makers in touch with them so they may visualise what improvements are required. Light land was used in the morning and heavy loam in the afternoon and included both tractor and horse work by a variety of instruments, though the exhibition was in the main concerned with tractors.

1926 12 02

The official testing took place of the bridges along the new road through Coe Fen, The Fen Causeway. They are Snobbs' Bridge, Flood Water Bridge and the River Bridge. The last is the most important and five steam rollers and one steam tractor, together weighing 63 tons were driven across it, passing each other, thus making 63 tons rolling weight, equivalent to about 100 tons dead weight. The Cambridge Borough Surveyor and councillors boarded a punt and viewed the deflectometer under the bridge, which gave a satisfactory reading. The foundations consist of 100 piles of 40 feet length, weighing about four tons each

1927 10 08

A fire broke out in the stackyard at Further Farm, Stretham fen and eight were totally destroyed. Considerable difficulty was experienced in getting the fire engine to the farm owing to the condition of the drove, but with the help of three horses from the farm this was accomplished. Mr F. Oakey drove from Ely in his motor and arrived before the firemen. He dashed into the flames and drove out a practically red hot tractor from between the blazing stacks into a place of safety. Luckily a good supply of water was available from the dykes which had been filled by opening the dam at Morton's Farm.

1927 12 06

Alfred Seaman, of Lt Chesterford told magistrates he was driving a steam tractor and saw a lorry proceeding towards Saffron Walden. The lorry was travelling about 25 mph and he gave it plenty of room to pass. He looked back and saw it crash into the Eight Bells public house. William Wright said he did not understand much about speed but the lorry was travelling at a terrific rate, which caused it to skid. PC Little said there were marks which showed it skidded 27 yards before it mounted the pavement and crashed into the doorway of the public house.

1928 04 05

The Cam Conservators had met Pamplin Bros who suggested using two of their steam tractors, one working at each end of Stourbridge Common, to barrow and roll the spoil deposited by dredging operations and prepare it for a seed bed. It will also need one or two horses with chain harrows to get at the small weeds. It was suggested that to make a good job of it and turn it into a recreation ground a drainer should be used. This would get rid of the water on the Common and make it quite dry.

1931 06 05

Farmers forgot their troubles and flocked to the annual Agricultural Show at Manor Park, Chatteris. Special trains, buses and private cars brought over 6,000 visitors and over 500 cars were parked in an adjoining meadow. In spite of the motor tractor the horse is by no means a back number in farming work and there were 78 entries in the Shire horse classes though Percherons and Suffolks showed an unexpected falling off. 31 06 05j

1931 07 03

The last vans, trains of tractors and heavy wagons have made their way from the Showman's Guild fair ground, Newmarket Road, bearing the dismantled remains of the devices which have thrilled thousands during the week. The Guild have eliminated the undesirables and shown Cambridge that

travelling folk are as sober and industrious as the rest. Midsummer Common was more central but the only complaints were about the bus fares to the ground. 31 07 03a

1931 11 27

Lt Downham accident – tractor – 31 11 27d

1932 02 11

Mole draining uses a cutting implement which bores a channel beneath the ground and so drains the water away. It is not a new method: in the olden days many good mole drains were cut by eight or ten horses drawing the drainer. Then came the advent of steam and the cable set. Now a demonstration using tractors was held at the University Farm using Garrett, Marshall, Case and a variety of other machines. Even though the ground was frozen they cut through it as if it had been cheese. 32 02 11

1932 04 06

Astonishing examples of hardship to farmers were cited at a tithe payers meeting at Willingham. There was an agricultural depression with Norfolk farmers going bankrupt at the rate of one a day. Land worth £25 an acre in 1925 was not worth £5 today, yet the same tithe had to be paid on it. At recent sales of farmers' goods a dozen sheep had been bought for 2s 6d (12p) and a tractor for 2s (10p). It is impossible to get blood out of a stone, but it is possible to smash it – and that was the attitude of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. 32 04 06 a& b

1932 04 27

A tractor caused a blaze on the farm of Mr John Scambler between Conington and Elsworth. Mr Richard Scambler was engaged in baling straw when the tractor back-fired and ignited a twenty-ton hay stack. A strong wind made it impossible to extinguish the flames. The stack was entirely destroyed and the tractor and baler damaged. 32 04 27b

1932 06 16

During mole draining on a Bourn farm the operator noticed the mole was pulling very hard and reduced the depth from one foot to ten inches. The land was very stiff, heavy and stony and oil consumption on his Fordson tractor was 30 gallons a day. But another contractor said such a tractor could pull a mole and drain 18 inches deep on such land and should consume only 12 gallons. The price charged was extortionate. 32 06 16a

1933 01 11

During threshing operations at Rectory Farm, Ickleton, a number of stacks became fired, apparently by a backfire from a tractor that was being used. Ickleton Fire Brigade turned out but the water supply was insufficient to extinguish the blaze. Had the wind been in the other direction the extensive farm buildings must have been threatened. 33 01 11a

1933 07 18

The giro-tiller, an interesting piece of agricultural machinery, was demonstrated at the University Farm. It looks like a large tractor behind which are two sets of blades affixed to revolving drums which break up the land to a depth of 18 inches in clay. They cost several thousand pounds and are intended for contractors who charge thirty shillings an hour for doing the work. 33 07 18

1937 10 15

Linton Village College could help the agricultural industry and help stem the drift from the countryside to the towns. It is intended to serve as a community centre for education, recreation and social life, the Earl of Feversham said at the opening. The teaching of mathematics would have a realistic connection with what went on in the workshop and school garden. It has a workshop equipped with lathes and means of learning about the internal combustion engine (with an eye on the farm tractor) and electricity while girls do cookery, housewifery and laundry work in the domestic science room. 37 10 15a

1938 01 12

Three stacks, a tractor and threshing drum were destroyed at a fire at College Farm, Caxton End, Eltisley. Firemen obtained water from the farm pond, emptying it three times. But after it was used the water drained back along a ditch to the pond again, thus providing a perpetual supply. Then it started to rain and poured all night. Other farm buildings containing carts and a number of other implements, together with wheat, hay and linseed stacks were saved. Four years ago the farmhouse was burnt down 38 01 12a

1939 09 20

During the Great War food was in short supply and Motor Agents were told to buy up mechanical implements. They managed to get some tractors and others arrived from America. Ladies, college tutors and errand boys came forward to drive and groups of engineers formed to attend them. At first they ploughed both day and night though farmers complained they turned up the sub-soil, making the land unusable. Now, once more at war, we must grow more food, Rotarians were told. 39 09 20e

1940 05 09

Fordson Tractors advertisement features WWI U-Boats- 40 05 09a

1940 11 18

Lt Downham evacuee death – run over by tractor – 40 11 18a

1941 03 27

Ancient tractors being used in field as precaution against parachutists – photos – 41 03 27

1942 02 20

Firemen go 1¾ miles for water. A fifty-ton stack of baled wheat straw caught fire on Friday at Great Wilbraham. Units of the Cambridge N.F.S, attended, and water had to be relayed for 1¾ miles. The fire started at about 1.45 p.m., but the N.F.S. was not notified until the evening. A tractor near the stack was damaged.

1945 01 20

George Kidman of Dry Drayton on radio programme, talks of tractor driving – 45 01 20

1945 10 19

Skilled Farmworkers. In the House of Commons on Thursday week the Member for Cambridgeshire (Mr. A. E. Stubbs) asked the Minister of Labour if he would give consideration to placing skilled farmworkers, namely common housekeepers and tractor drivers in Group B owing to the great need of the special workers in agriculture. Mr. George Isaacs, in reply, said: "I would, refer the Hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Hallam on 9th October, a copy of which I am sending him. The reply referred to by Mr. Isaacs was as follows: "Considerable assistance has been, given to agriculture by the loan of Service labour to help with harvesting and by the grant to leave to agricultural workers. The question to whether further steps by way of special releases from the Forces can be taken in under examination." We understand _that Mr. Stubbs is to raise this matter again in the Commons at any early date.

1945 10 26

Ploughing Match. A ploughing match of the Sawston District Young Farmers' Club and the Hinxton, Ickleton and Duxford Ploughing Society was held on land belonging to Messrs. A. Home and L. Howe on Saturday, when there were 22 entries for the horse and tractor classes. It was judged by Messrs. A. Tinney, of Horseheath; F. H. Garner, manager of Higham Estates; C. L. Marr and J. Smith. The competitors found ploughing difficult, as the ground was hard. Refreshments on the field were provided by the president, Mr. I. Howe. The event was followed by a ploughmen's supper in the Sawston Village College, the principal guests at which were Mrs. Bowen, who has always taken an interest in agricultural activities in the district, and who presented the prizes; Mr. Howe, Mr S. A. Taylor, Mr. J. A. McMillan, Mr. Tangney and Mr. Marr, Mr. W. L. Wood was toastmaster, and a

number of toasts were proposed and replied to. The evening concluded with an entertainment by the Foxton Yokels Concert Party. The following were winners: Single-furrow horse plough—1 S. Pledger, 2 A. Whitehead and H. Nunn (equal). Two-furrow tractor plough—1 S. A. Badcock, D. Neale. Three or more furrow tractor—1 E. C. Barton, 2 F. Whitby, 3 J. Wright. Three or more furrow tractor plough for young farmer's—1 J. Churchman, 2 H. D. J Stigwood, 3 B. Beavis, complimentary, L. Allen. Special prizes: Best horse team—A. Whitehead; best tractor turnout—D. Stigwood; best work done by a Ransome tractor plough (given by makers)—I. R. Fordham, 2 H. R. Driver.

1948 08 13

Though many crops in Cambridgeshire have been badly laid by the rain, there has not as yet been a big wastage in the county through the weather. E.R. Benson, secretary of the National farmers' Union said, "The shortage of labour is a serious problem, this is one the Minister of Agriculture must have been aware of when he knew that prisoner of war labour was going. Owing to the sodden state of the ground binders will be unable to cut unless they are of the kind which can be power-driven from tractors. Sunshine is needed, not heavy winds, because stiff breezes will tend to shell out the ripe corn"

1950 10 26

A farmer, who said he was forced to employ Czechs, Germans, Poles, Irishmen and gypsies, because he could not house English workers, applied for possession of one of his farm cottages at Fen Ditton. The occupant had previously been employed as a farm worker and tractor driver but had quit his employment to go to Marshall's. The cottage was need for another farm worker. Of his 14 service cottages this was the only one not occupied by an employee.

1951 12 10

For the first time, winners of ploughing societies' matches in the county met to decide the champion ploughman. The winner was M. Bowers of Cottenham who received the Championship cup and the cup for best work in the horse ploughing class. The youngest ploughman on the field, 14-years-old G. Bailey of Willingham bowed to a more experienced man when he was placed second to J. Hammance (Sutton) in the heavy tractor class, but he did have the pleasure of beating his father, E. Bailey, into third position. E. Blunt of Cottenham was first in the light tractor class.

1952 12 22

Cambridge was "rather quiet" as far as Christmas shoppers were concerned. The secretary of Joshua Taylor said they had fathers looking fondly and possessively at boy's train sets, girls examining intricately-mechanised farm tractors and boys glancing critically at dark-eyed dolls. The most precocious doll will blow bubbles and weep real tears, drink milk and needs nappies - and she carries a pipe in her purse (for the bubbles). But the sturdy reliable walker was still the most popular doll of all.

1953 04 25

A Fiat crawler tractor has been adapted to pull a Fowler eleven-tine cultivator at the NIAB experimental farm at Lolworth. With this implement 85 acres of Kimeridge and Ampthill clay were cultivated to a depth of 14 inches. The cultivator was originally designed for cable operation between two steam ploughing engines and was adapted for use with a crawler under the supervision of Mr F.H. Spicer, bailiff of the farm

1953 10 29

An old-established ironmongery and harness business at Melbourn, J.E. Hagger and Son, has finished trading because of the increase in the use of motors and tractors and the consequent decline in the demand for harness work. It had been founded at the end of the 19th century. Before the war two harness makers and two apprentices were employed but now there was scarcely sufficient work for one man. At the small Bassingbourn branch, opened in 1911, one man worked on making and repairing harness.

1954 05 26

Only a fenman can portray the fens as they are and capture their atmosphere and the characteristics of the people. To anyone else, says James Wentworth Day, 'It looks like mile after mile of black damn-all'. But they are rich in tradition and in his latest book 'A History of the Fens' he has tried to give a 'human' history before the 'spitting of the tractor' when it had a magic enchantment and fish were taken by the hundredweight from the lodes and drains. He describes the average fenman as 'still sturdily independent, often narrow-minded &, suspicious of strangers'

1954 10 10 c

A man was killed when two 1,000-lb bombs exploded at RAF Marham. The bombs were being moved in preparation for an exercise when they fell from a trailer he was towing with a tractor. Five other airmen were injured and nine Canberra twin-jet bombers and one Anson aircraft were damaged. Eight of the Canberras can be repaired on the station.

1955 04 15

Two men were fined £10 each for stealing 16 sacks of Brussels sprouts from a field at Ashwell. When the field was ready men were engaged as pickers on piecework. Each 20 lb bag was weighed, piled in the field and then taken by tractor to the roadside where it was removed by lorry. As the result of information received police stopped their van and caught the men red-handed. They had taken the sprouts from a field at Moggs Hole and were going to sell them to a man in Beeston 55 04 15a

1955 04 26

At the last two sales of machinery at Cambridge Cattle Market there has been considerable congestion in all the main roads and residents complained that nearly 600 cars had been parked in the streets in addition to more than 1,000 in the market car parks. The City Surveyor suggested demolishing loose boxes and a Nissen hut to provide 250 more spaces. The machinery sales were probably the largest in the world attracting buyers from overseas. About 250 tractors were refused for sale owing to the lack of space. 55 04 26

1955 10 07

Felsted Sugar Beet Factory has begun to receive beet for processing into white sugar. Amongst the first to send a consignment was Audley End Farms. Their Home Farm has obtained a good yield by means of a system of irrigation, unique in the district. A tractor-powered centrifugal pump distributes water down a network of aluminium pipes to 20 sprinklers up to half-a-mile away. Without it the crop would almost certainly have been a failure. 55 10 07

1956 02 08

An 82-feet long bog oak has been unearthed at Chear Farm, Stretham. The trunk was over four feet wide and weighed over eight tons. It was cut into four sections before being removed by tractor to Turpin's woodyard in Cambridge where it will be cut and dried. It will then be used to make specimen items of Old English joinery. Only once before has bog oak been used in this way and the experiment was not very successful. 56 02 08, 56 02 18b

1956 02 20

A Roman 'rubbish pit' has been unearthed in The Stacks field at Willingham. Michael Hopkins made the discovery when fragments of pottery were brought to the surface by a tractor-drawn plough. The dumps or pits are where the housewife of the day would dispose of broken earthenware. It is the sixth to be found on the site and has yielded pottery of various types. 56 02 20

1956 06 30

Lightning struck a farm building containing valuable implements at Hall Farm, Barton Mills. The thatched roof caught light and £2,500 worth of equipment was destroyed; only one tractor was saved. A life insurance agent who was at the farm at the time used a fire extinguisher while the owner

summoned the fire brigade. A Mildenhall man saw the flash of lightning and thought 'a ball of fire' had fallen on the farm. 56 06 30a

1956 09 13

It is a 'black harvest' year as adverse weather has put paid to many crops. Where farmers in sheer desperation have tried to get their combines working many have found them bogged down and have to be pulled out by crawler tractors. The pea crop is practically a total loss, blight has affected potatoes and scab and brown rot have hit apples and pears. The tomato crop is almost a failure but sprouts look well. 56 09 13

1956 10 03

The Ferguson tractor has been a familiar sight since production started nine years ago and the introduction of a new model has been long awaited. It is built by the Standard Motor Company and costs £558, £25 more than the old model. It has a choice of three engines, petrol, Diesel and vaporising oil and a double gearbox providing six forward and two reverse gears. The man behind the wheel will appreciate the comfort of an upholstered seat. 56 10 03b

1957 02 18

A farmer from Craft Hill Farm, Dry Drayton probably saved the life of a pilot who crashed in a Vampire jet aircraft in a field. He gave first aid to the airman who'd been thrown from the wreckage and was unconscious. He removed his harness, helmet, leggings and the watch from the pilot's swollen and discoloured arm. Then when an ambulance, a Jeep and a fire engine became bogged down he got a tractor and pulled them out. If the plane had exploded he'd have been blown sky high. 57 02 18

1957 05 10

A farmer from Wayhead, Coveney said he'd started as a smallholder in December 1947 with two acres from his father, £10 in cash and implements lent him by relatives. He sowed an acre of sugar beet and an acre of potatoes and got on nicely making £5 a week. But he suffered bad harvests and the wheat was overrun with rabbits. He'd bought a second-hand tractor for £30 but had sold it for £5. Now he had a £500 overdraft. 57 05 10c

1957 06 29

When returning from Ely Fair after a 'good night out', three Mepal landworkers saw Marcus Darby's tractor standing on the grass verge at Sutton with the ignition key in place. When one of them suggested "Let's have a taxi home" all three piled on to it and took it four hundred yards to the aerodrome, where they left it. The lads were of good character and had been well behaved in the village. They were fined £1 each and had their licences endorsed. 57 06 29a

1958 04 17

Jack Branch demonstrates tractor device – 58 04 17

1958 06 28

Haverhill is virtually at a standstill following the floods with the Bury St Edmunds road still blocked by 3ft 6 inches of water. Coal lorries, farm wagons and tractors were used to reach people stranded in the town centre and a meals on wheels service was laid on for people marooned in the upper storeys of their houses. The market place was full of stranded cars and lorries; as it was market day two lone stallholders set up their stalls in a dry spot, but had no customers. 58 06 28

1959 02 23

The Lucas depot on the Newmarket Road offers expert overhaul of fuel injection diesel engines with special equipment beyond the financial reach of many garages. They also check and overhaul Lucas electrical equipment. The stores hold nearly 4,000 bits and pieces each sealed in polythene and 'factory fresh'. There are batteries for scooters, tractors, whoppers for special jobs and units for the locally-built Lister Jaguars. Practically everyone who works there lives in Cambridge. 59 02 23

1960 04 06

There has never been more work for a blacksmith than there is today, with the ever-increasing number of children's ponies together with the repairing of machinery, for a tractor is far more destructive than a horse ever was. But there are fewer young people willing to learn the job and the training period was a long one, longer even than that of a doctor. There are now 11 thatchers and plenty of work for them to do but the problem lay in obtaining the right kind of materials as combined straw is no good. There are only three potters and millwrights are fast disappearing the Rural Industries Organiser, R.C. Lambeth, reported 60 04 06

1960 04 30

Jack Wright of Howlett End, Wimbish, started work as an apprentice in a tiny blacksmith's shop owned by F. Bright at Thaxted in 1896. During the Great War he served in the Field Artillery as a shoeing-smith, then set up his own business in Wimbish. Now, aged 80, he is still wielding his smith's hammer. "Of course there are not many working horses to be shod these days, but I still prefer them to the modern tractor", he said. 60 04 30

1960 06 03

Not many girls can claim dairy farming as their hobby, but 24 year-old Margaret Stocker of Hemingford Grey helps her brothers farm more than 650 acres of land. Lifting heavy sacks of corn and cattle food does not present any problem; she helps with ploughing, straw baling, feeding the stock, tractor driving or harvesting and makes butter three evenings a week. A lively, interesting girl, she has the clear complexion of someone she spends most of her time out of doors. 60 06 03

1960 11 11

Bassingbourn Village College have inaugurated agricultural classes for young men between the ages of 15 and 18 years. The two-year course provides education for farm workers one day a week and covers stockmanship, crop husbandry farm implements and tractors using equipment provided by local farmers. Mr C.F. Standen, a smallholder, says 'You have got to encourage boys to go on the land nowadays. Farming is becoming easier but you have still got to have the men. The best implement is the sunshine: it makes everything so much easier to work' 60 11 11

1962 12 07

Reed and sedge plants grow wild in Wicken Fen. Reed needs to be cut annually in the depth of winter while sedge is normally harvested in the spring. In the past, cutting was done entirely by hand, the reeds being tied in bundles a yard in circumference and carried three at a time to the lode-side. There it was loaded into a flat-bottomed barge and pulled by 'one donkey power' to the stacking site to await sale. Today the donkey has been replaced by an outboard motor and the actual cutting is done mechanically with a tractor and Allen scythe. One may regret the passing of picturesque methods of the past, but they were very hard work and economically unrewarding 62 12 07d

1972 12 19

Snowy Farr, the self-styled King of the Road, who has raised more than £1,400 for the blind in two years, has been priced off the road with the tractor that tows his mobile menagerie. Since Snowy bought the tractor two years ago to replace the tricycle he had used previously he has driven it on a £5 a year concessionary licence. But now he has been told that he must have a general haulage tractor licence which costs £60 and he says he hasn't got the money. Snowy first became famous when the cart he used for his work as a roadman around Oakington began to take on a very individual appearance as he added to its basic shape. He then started to take his pet animals with him. Someone suggested he should raise money for charity because so many people gathered to see his mobile show wherever he went.

1973 03 10

An ancient forest of bog oaks has been dug up in a 10-acre field at Soham Fen. A contractor ploughing the field only three inches deeper than usual found his plough catching two or three oaks in

every run across the field. Mr John Fletcher who farms the field said; "I've been cultivating this land all my life and only struck the odd one, but this year it is just as if there is a whole forest of them. It has taken four men with two tractors a fortnight to clear the field. Some of the oaks were 60 feet long and had to be cut into three parts before the tractors could pull them out". A National Farmer's Union spokesman said "The oaks lie at the bottom of the peat soil on the hard sub-soil. By ploughing deeper Mr Fletcher has struck this level". He said: "Bog oaks are not as common around Ely as they used to be as most of them have been cleared. They are several thousand years old"

1973 06 23

Two Mid-Anglia farm workers with 106 years' service between them will be presented with long-service awards at the East of England Show. Mr Bertie Cowl of Soham can look back on 52 years on the land, most of them working for the same employer. Mr Harry Pryor can look back on an almost unbroken span of 54 years on the same farm at Great Shelford. Mr Cowl was born in Soham Fen. When the late Mr Herbert Bedford took over Fletcher's farm he joined him and has been there ever since. As farming has become more mechanised Mr Cowl has one special regret: "I particularly miss horses", he said. Mr Pryor who is 70 started on a farm at the age of 10 as a part-time cattle drover earning 3d a week. "We used to leave off school at 12 and then I'd run down to the village to take the cows from the fields into the barns for milking". He has never fully come to terms with driving a tractor and still looks back affectionately to when horse provided the power in the fields

1973 11 09

The 10,000 agricultural workers in mid-Anglia were today bitterly disappointed at the £2.30 a week rise awarded by the Agricultural Wages Board after 10 hours of negotiation. The workers' spokesman said they were bound to be aggrieved at the award which gives a new basic rate of £21.80. The farm workers had asked for a £25 a week minimum wage. The higher rate of increase will go to tractor drivers, horticultural specialists, stockmen and foremen.

1976 01 15

Eight women working on an horticultural farm near Wisbech have come out strongly against the new sex discrimination and equal pay laws. They want to be freed from the legislation that would give them the same pay as the menfolk on the farm because they do not drive tractors or lift heavy boxes. They have told the Agricultural Wages Committee that as they are not willing to do this sort of heavy work, they would be satisfied with being paid 75% of the wages earned by the men.

1977 03 09

The experimental mini-roundabout at the junction of Newmarket Road and Coldham's Lane, Cambridge was working well on the first morning of its operation. Even at the height of the rush hour traffic was flowing smoothly. It has been put in temporarily while the traffic lights at the junction are being taken down; they will eventually be replaced with more up-to date lights as part of the Newmarket Road improvement scheme. Police Chief Inspector Maurice Murden said: "To think our problems have been solved by an old tractor tyre! It is something we have advocated for years, and now we just hope that it will become permanent". One driver said his driving time to his home in Chesterton had been cut from 20 minutes to five.

1978 03 01

A unique village 'industry' may have dried up at Earith, and villagers are delighted. Winter flooding on the main road to Cambridge meant that people with tractors could sometimes make money by towing out stranded motorists whose cars stalled in the water. But now the County council has spent £23,000 on raising the level of the road by more than ten inches, and hope that this will keep at bay the waters of the River Ouse. Previously flooding had meant the road was blocked to cars for sometimes 15 days a year.

1978 09 22

The tools used in 44 years of farming near Milton went under the hammer when nearly 500 items ranging from heavy-duty tractors to ancient forks figured in a selling-up sale. The Downham

Brothers, Richard and William, farmed about 70 acres of land from 1934. But William died last year and Richard decided to call it a day. A new road scheme has decimated the land, which will now go to other uses including the science park and light industry. An old tumbrel cart went for £40, tractors fetched £800 and £420 while some disc harrows were knocked down for £600 and a mower for £520.

1979 01 09

Crucial talks are being held to try to unravel Britain's transport crisis. The immediate threat to fuel supplies has eased but there will be no evening bus services in Cambridge and Ely; Eastern Counties say this is the best way to conserve stocks so that most bus services could operate for as long as possible. Some supplies are still getting through to Ely sugar beet factor where farmers are taking their own crops in with tractors and trailers as road haulage drivers are not crossing picket lines.

1980 08 15

The old ways have been bought back at New Farm, Tetworth where David Davenport is using a pre-war tractor and former horse-drawn combine, plus a 1907 steam engine to harvest a special crop of thatching straw. It is the first time he has planted long-stem wheat with an eye to cornering part of the thatching straw market and is using the old methods because a modern combine would damage the straw 80 08 15a

1982 01 22

British Rail engineers are to dismantle the arch of the rail bridge between Dullingham and Stetchworth, leaving a gaping hole in the road. A replacement is urgently needed but the bridge sits in fine rolling landscape and a concrete structure would detract from the beauty of the countryside. For the men who work on the Hall Farm, part of the Stetchworth Estate, it means a five-mile journey by tractor just to get to their fields down the road. 82 01 22

1982 09 04

Nearly 100 banner-waving Prickwillow parents joined forces at Old Bank and, led by a tractor and trailer carrying a replica of their village school, sang as they marched to Ely to protest at plans for its closure. They are unhappy about the idea of four-and-five-year-old children travelling four miles to school and claim savings in running costs will be eaten up by the price of transport. 82 09 04

1983 02 28

Most pumping plant in the fens has been renewed with automatically controlled electric motors but some boards fear they are too dependent on mains electric and have made arrangements for farmers' tractors to operate pumps in time of emergency. 'Conservation' is another area of potential conflict: water-courses must be kept clear of aquatic vegetation, which proves unpopular. Progress is not helped by extremists who delight in ignoring all views other than their own. 83 02 28 & a and 83 02 28b & c

1983 09 19

A tractor trailer loaded with straw smashed three first floor windows when it passed by the Bell Inn in High Street, Linton. Landlord John Pearman was sitting watching television when the steel side supports holding the straw hit the 400-year-old pub. Identical leaded windows will have to be used in repairs because the building is listed. The cost of the damage is unknown. 83 09 19 p3

1985 01 23

Hundreds of farmers and traders flocked to Milton Road sale ground for the biggest traction auction in the country. Yilmaz Alademir had come all the way from Farmagusta, Cyprus looking for a tractor he could ship home as they were much cheaper in England. A more typical buyer was Gavin Hamilton of Manor Farm, Great Chesterford. He was looking for wheels and rollers among the dozens of machines and implements at the back of the saleground. The sale was started in the early 1940s by Mr Henry Grain & Cambridge auctioneers Cheffins, Grain and Chalk have been pulling the crowds ever since 85 01 23b

1990 02 22

An old broken-down 1930s Fordson tractor has been painted red, blue and green and given a new lease of life as a toy for primary schoolchildren at Girton Glebe school. – 87 11 16

1990 02 22

Top Farm at Toseland remained unchanged for decades as the owners carried on farming as they always had. But when the roof of the farmhouse, a listed building, collapsed, the sole survivor had to move to an old peoples' home. Now the agricultural implements are to be sold. The most modern piece of equipment is a 1947 Fordson Major tractor. Three wooden carts, a winnowing machine, eight-row horse-drawn Smyth seed drill and hand flails are also to be auctioned 90 02 22a